



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION IX

75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

JUN 15 2011

Colonel Mark Toy
District Engineer
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Los Angeles District
PO Box 532711
Los Angeles, CA 90053-2325

Subject: Public Notice (PN) SPL-2006-01951-MAS for the proposed Forest Lawn Memorial Park-Hollywood Park Expansion, Los Angeles, California

Dear Colonel Toy:

This letter is in response to the Corps' May 18, 2011 PN regarding the cemetery expansion proposed by the Forest Lawn Memorial Park Association (applicant) within the City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California. The project involves construction of twelve debris basins and permanent fill and relocation of approximately 2.2 miles of natural streams tributary to Sennett Creek and the Los Angeles River. Based on the information currently available, it appears the application does not comply with the 404(b)(1) Guidelines and may result in substantial and unacceptable impacts to "aquatic resources of national importance." EPA hereby identifies the application as a candidate for our headquarters' review pursuant to the procedures outlined in our agencies' 1992 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) regarding §404(q) of the Clean Water Act (CWA).

The project is located at the base of the Santa Monica Mountains within the 704-acre Sennett Creek sub-watershed of the LA River watershed. The LA River watershed is one of the largest in southern California and has suffered significant cumulative impacts (approximately 500 of its 824 square miles have been converted from a natural stateⁱ). Maintaining and restoring the health of the LA River watershed is a priority for both our agencies (see for example, our collaboration on the pilot LA River Urban Steams Federal Partnership) and our state partner agencies (EPA and the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board have designated it a Measure "W" priority watershedⁱⁱ). On July 7, 2010, EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson announced scientific and economic findings supporting the designation of the entire 51-mile LA River as a "Traditional Navigable Water," thus ensuring CWA protections for the river and strengthening future protections throughout the watershed.


The project site drains to the LA River immediately north of a reach known as the "Glendale Narrows" (Narrows), which represents some of the highest quality riverine habitat remaining in the watershed. This area is fed by natural springs and retains natural rocky bottom habitat with dense stands of willow, sycamore, and cottonwood trees. The trails along the river are heavily used by the public for hiking, horseback riding, and bird watching. The project site is located within the River Corridor of the LA River Revitalization Master Plan and is also in close proximity to two major restoration efforts: the LA River Demonstration Project and the LA River

Headworks. Seventeen intermittent streams on the project site drain to Sennett Creek, which runs west through the property to its confluence with the LA River and the Narrows.

According to the PN, the applicant proposes to grade approximately 147 acres of undeveloped area to accommodate 200,000 interment sites and associated support facilities. As proposed, the project would permanently impact 110 acres of natural, high-quality woodland, scrub and riparian communities that currently serve as a buffer to neighboring Griffith Park, designated by local planning authorities as a Significant Ecological Area (SEA)ⁱⁱⁱ. Several of the streams in the Forest Lawn Memorial Park are significant tributaries to the LA River and provide important watershed functions (e.g., aquatic habitat, water and sediment supply and retention, and groundwater recharge). A condition assessment indicated that these streams are among highest quality habitat left within the LA River watershed.^{iv} Modification of these tributaries has the potential to cause substantial and unacceptable adverse impacts to both Sennett Creek and the LA River, and it has not been demonstrated that less damaging alternatives are impracticable.

EPA is committed to protecting the water quality, wildlife and recreational values of the LA River watershed from further impairment, and working to preserve and restore these functions to the extent practicable. The Corps is a much-valued partner in these objectives, and we thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and work with you to ensure CWA compliance for this project. As information on project alternatives, impact avoidance, and mitigation planning becomes available, please have your staff coordinate their review with Eric Raffini at (415) 972-3544 or raffini.eric@epa.gov. If you wish to discuss this matter personally, please call me at (415) 972-3572, or Jason Brush, Chief of our Wetlands Office, at (415) 972-3483.

Sincerely,

 15 July 2011
Alexis Strauss
Director, Water Division

cc: Rick Mayfield, California Department of Fish and Game Region 5
Valerie Carrillo, Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board
Romel Pascual, City of Los Angeles
John Orme, Forest Lawn Memorial Park Association

ⁱ www.waterboards.gov Los Angeles River Watershed (WMI Chapter- December 2007 version)

ⁱⁱ www.epa.gov/region9/water/watershed/measurew.html

ⁱⁱⁱ Los Angeles County designated Griffith Park a SEA in 1976 in recognition of its role for gene and species movement between the Santa Monica, San Gabriel, and Verdugo Mountains. A SEA designation is intended to protect wildlife migration corridors and valuable habitat for native plants, birds and mammals.

^{iv} Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Hollywood Hills: CA Rapid Assessment Method Executive Summary, Aug 2010